

A Weak and Idle Theme

A Tale of the Dreaming

by Son-of-the-Paladin

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The bipedal selachimorph just stood in the middle of the woods. If they were confused, their face did not express it. Most Denizens who find themselves in these gloomy woods descended from the Cavern of Flame, but still emerge from the Oaken Gate as if gone astray. How much more so those poor souls abducted from their light slumber by the machinations of the woods' furtive rodent residents or by the caprice of Chaos!

During many a long sabbatical, I had come to know well the ways of this damnable grove. Before the Sharkling, two paths diverged in those beguiled woods—one lit by phosphorescent fungal blooms, the other tread in darkness. The poppet stared down the lighted path as far as their eyes could see, to where it bent in the undergrowth. It was a pleasing path, though one must tread the luminous mushrooms underfoot to walk its length. For the depth they could perceive in the benighted path, one may think it just as fair, as the grass seems to want for wear. A subtle shift in the youngling's weight aimed her toward the shadows, and I stepped in to cut her off.

"If you're thinking the lighted path is a trap made to be more alluring, I assure you the zoogs are not quite *that* cunning. They are ambush predators, and culled the other path of the glowing fungi for their trap."

"What is a zoog?"

"A large rodent resembling a lemur with a cephalopod or asteroidea on its face." I reached into the shadow to grab the nearest beast, and, with a fluid motion of my wrist, snapped its mangy neck and yeeted the corpse at their feet. The small Denizen's face did not change, but they took a step back away from the remains. "Your first time in the Enchanted Wood? I am Zafe the Faun; I will happily guide you out if you join me on the way south to Ulthar."

"My name is Toolee; you can call me Too. I do not know where *Old Tar* is, but I've never heard of the Enchanted Wood either. How long will it take to walk out of this forest?"

"We're very near the centre, about 20 miles in all directions, so a little under a day by hoof."

"A day?" they asked. There was the slightest hint of frustration in their voice, but not a single trace of emotion did Toolee's face betray.

"It is much faster to travel by the wind. You do know how to fly, right?" For the first time, Too studied my hooves, realising that they touched not the ground. Their delicate feet, clothed only in socks, rested upon the earth,

"How do you do that?"

"Seriously? Just realise that you can. Jump in the air, and ignore the possibility of falling!"

The Sharkling pondered on this a moment, and then jumped into the air and stretched out their arms. In under five seconds, Toolee crashed face first into the ground. They made multiple attempts to copy my ungrounded state.

“Clearly you don’t have the instinctive makings of an oneiromancer... I have an idea.” I swept the small selachimorph up into my arms, and I couldn’t help but notice their cute yet expressionless face. We lifted up to the canopy, and I held them at arms’ length.

“Even babies can fly. Whatever you do, just don’t touch the ground!” Like a baby bird, I dropped them. The sudden rush of fear was enough to awaken the desire not to touch the ground. They stopped about a foot above. “I’m so proud of you, Fledgling! Now just stop thinking about it and never touch the ground again! But, so you don’t worry, I will hold your hand until we are out of the Enchanted Wood...”

Shortly, we moved out of the fungal forest; we travelled south along the west bank of the River Skai before reaching the stony bridge to Ulthar.

“In Ulthar, the burgesses answer to the King of Cats. Twice each year, the Denizens of Skai and even foreign lands come to deal in the great market and to visit the ivied stone tower of the gods’ temple on its hilly platform. Unfortunately, it’s one of those occasions, and that means finding a place to stay could be difficult. I do know a place that is extremely selective about their clientele, so a room may be available.” Passing through the cottages of the outskirts and tracing around the village proper we arrived at the door of the *Maison Minette*. At four storeys, it’s one of the tallest residences in Ulthar. As the local hot springs resort, it is elitist and exclusive. Too’s face registered no reaction to the relative luxury compared to the rustic housing we had passed along the way.

Inside, a rather large farm cat sat on his desk, lapping at a saucer of milk. He looked up and sneered at us.

“Well met, Cheshire! Is the proprietor of this lavish establishment available?” I enquired.

“Yuh’re lookin’ at ‘im, Good-fellow.” the Grinner answered.

“Moving up in the world, these days, Chesh? Well met, indeed.”

“Yer arrival was anticipated. Our sov’reign receiv’d word by raven, and we’s was ask’d to accommodate yuh, but no mention was made of no attendant!”

“I am sure I can recompense you for her meagre extra needs.”

“This establishment does not need bother yer *esteem’d* Retainer fer barbarous coin. We’s can surely come t’some agreement?” The nefarious feline licked his chops and eyed my petite companion.

“Well, Too, it seems if you do not wish to sleep in the streets, we’ll either have to supply him with a ‘piece of tail’ or a filet from your tail.”

“I’ve been fucked by cats before.” I did not expect so crude a word from the mouth of a poppet.

“Well, I will leave you to it then. As he said, I have business with the Monarch.” Turning to the innkeeper, “I will tolerate no harm befalling her, or I will take it out on your hide in kind.”

“Is illegal fer a man to kill a cat in Ulthar.”

“What good fortune I’m not of the race of man, then—but I made no mention of *killing*. Do not doubt that if Toolee here is hurt, then upon my return, you will yearn for death.” The grimaced face of the cat never lost its smile, but the guiling eyes and raised brow could not hide the subtle hint of fear.

As I left, Toolee followed the cat into his boudoir. Casting aside their creamsicle-orange cloak, Too slowly removed their oodie smock, so they stood in just their mispaired-orange socks and toffee-stitched white bloomers. They folded their arms over their pale flat chest, and the Cheshire slipped its paws into their waistband. When the bloomers touched the floor, Toolee sat theirselves down in the cat’s sleeping nook.

Chesh approached the Sharkling and parted their legs. The glabrous vulva smelled pleasingly of the beach, and the feline did not hesitate to lick at Too’s lips. The feel of moistened, fine-grained sandpaper was not unpleasant, eliciting moans and cooing from the chimeric shorty. When the cat’s saliva had sufficiently mixed with Toolee’s natural wetness, the animal flipped the diminutive Denizen onto their belly, their legs dangling over the bed’s side.

Toolee knew what was coming. If the sensation of the tongue had been pleasing, the cat’s member would border on torture with its penile barbs! The Cheshire elevated the hefty shark tail, gently stroking the muscular, cartilaginous extremity. He even licked its underside, which on the sharkskin felt better to the tiny humanoid than the tongue did on their cunny, but there was no gentleness to the bestial thrusting that followed! Toolee’s moans could have been the sounds of pleasure or pain, but there was no mistaking the satiated mewings of the brusque tom.

When I returned to the inn, the Cheshire cat was slumped over his bed. The abundance of crumpled tissue strewn about the floor hinted at such excessive bouts of mating that I was almost concerned for his health. I found Too soaking in the spring-fed pools.

“I feel a sudden hankering for broiled sea bass.” This failed to elicit a smile or even a look in my direction. I shed my clothes, grabbed a tray of soaps and oils, and joined Toolee in the baths. “This is nicer than bathing in a stream. Would you like me to wash your back?”

Toolee chirped a quiet “Yes”, and I soaped up their back. After what they went through, I wouldn’t make a move to soap up the front unless they asked me to. All Too offered was reciprocation, and that was when I revealed the disjointed reach of my non-Vitruvian arms and made a shew of soaping it up on my own.

“At daybreak, I have to set off for the city of Ilek-Vad. You could probably find more humble lodgings for a while—and I’ll return and help you search for a way home after I finish my business—or, you’re welcome to continue on with me?”

“I will keep travelling with you,” Toolee answered without hesitation.

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At first light, we returned across the stony bridge to the town of Hatheg on the eastern bank of the Skai. Boarding a southbound Steamer, we made way down the river to the coastal city of Dylath-Leen in only a few hours, a journey which on foot from Ulthar would have taken days. The basalt city is a sullen hive of scum and villainy, very different from the quaint villages of the hill country to its north. It is the only city along the Skai with a skyport, and time concerns dictated we must travel by airship to Ilek-Vad. Were I alone, I would have found other means of travel, but I dared not endanger my companion.

Disembarking in the Black City, we made way through the narrow cobblestone roads past merchants in queer robes and every manor of sailor known in the Earth’s hypnotic realm. My tiny shadow made note of the different peoples and costumes, as Dylath-Leen is more metropolitan than anything they had encountered in their native Arcanumia. From the shadows of a dubious alley, a gnarled, hairy-knuckled hand reached out to cover Toolee’s mouth. The assailant had to stoop to grab at them, and, as they struggled, his misshapen, twin-peaked turban slipped to reveal the inhuman horns rising from his forehead. Without hesitation, I withdrew my shashka and swung a single arc, separating the Lengite’s head from his shoulders. As the severed portion rolled to a stop, one could see the conniving grin of the too-wide mouth frozen in death. It’s most likely the slaver was acting alone, but, once returned to the Nightmare City, I should investigate if the almost-human’s beastly masters on the far side of the moon conspire against my Sovereign...

At the skyport, we boarded a brazen pinisi coursing for the gold, glass and marble city on the shore of the Twilight Sea. Except for a native merchant, Toolee and I were the ship’s only passengers. While the demi-human lounged on the prow, I would often join the Celephaïan sailors in their labours or converse with the Thoraboni captain of rumours and legends of the Unknown Lands; while in the night, we rested in a modest cabin behind the fo’c’sle. The cruise from Dylath-Leen to Ilek-Vad was a week’s time, and pinisis are not cruise ships or pleasure barges.

The wall between our cabin and the crew's bunks was simple wood, and the cacophonies of the nightly orgies of the crew were inescapable. Toolee dropped their clothes and sat on the bed beside me. They undid my pants and coaxed out my erection, so I reciprocated by moistening my fingers with saliva and sliding my hand between their legs. Too's quiet moans joined the symphony of ejaculations from our neighbours. As my phallus swelled to its maximum girth, I felt the need to apologise.

"I'm sorry it's not bigger."

"It's nicer than that damn cat's." Toolee grabbed a bottle of oil from the nightstand, filled their hand like a calyx, and generously applied the liquid to my member. The poppet then straddled my hips, forcing my cock inside them until it was hilted in their lips. Their bounces moved to the syncopation of the primal grunts beyond the threshold, and in no time, I shivered to orgasm. I struggled to maintain eye contact, but Toolee joined their lips to mine to stifle my auditory paroxysms. My seed flooded that vagina and ran down my shaft, adding to the oil's lubrication. I remained hard, but my head began to swirl and swim in the æther as my partner's vaulting exponentially increased in speed. Soon, their face showed the most emotion I had ever seen, and their climactic howling gave pause even to our neighbours! I took hold of their torso in a strong embrace and planted one more kiss before our strength failed us.

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After a week on the winds, we arrived at the gilded metropolis. It seemed an unknown star in the firmament bestowed upon the city a sky of perpetual sunset—such golds, oranges and pinks that should hide the Uranian immensity of night or day. Immediately, I rented an opulently engraved Nesseldof, and we made way down the vitreous avenues to the Court of the opal throne. In the open air, the Court appeared as a tholobate stupa. A single stylite sentinel barred our entry.

"The king of this Court will not suffer fools an audience; you must answer my riddle! What goes about on four legs at the Dawning, two legs by the noontide, and three legs in the bleak night?"

My companion tugged on my sleeve, their face on the verge of beaming, wishing to whisper in my ear.

"This is the riddle of the Theban sphinx that Œdipus solved. The answer is Man."

"The sphinx that asked this question is much older than the race of man," I retorted to the selachimorph. Turning to the inquisitor, I answered, "The answer is a terrible truth. In the land illuminated by Khepher-Aten, the Black Sphinx treads the desert. In the Waking, the Mighty Messenger walks with the semblance of Man, the waxen mask and robes that hide. In the night season, upon three mighty trunks, the Eidolon of the Bloody Tongue howls at the moon or from

an unhallowed summit upon it. His name has become a warning, ‘there is no safety at the Gate’, *Ny har rut hotep...*”

The challenge was gone, and, by a counter-clockwise motion, we circumambulated the golden hill to find the path brought us under the marmoreal platform, revealing the tholobate to be in fact the dome of a great mountainous castle. Upon the opal throne sat the king, surrounded by his council and courtiers. Much had changed in Randolph Carter’s appearance since he was last seen in de Marigny’s strange room in New Orleans. Zkauba of Yaddith was not abandoned, but, by that singular artefact of lost Yian-Ho in de Marigny’s possession, the host of Carter’s mental facet had moved bodily into the Deeper Slumber. Having acquired a facsimile of his lost parchment in the Waking, Carter sought to use the silver key to return his consciousness to his true body, yet the Midnight Sun is not Earth’s sun. Finally, by the sunset of Ilek-Vad, he found some magic still in the key, yet the results were not wholly those desired.

The Randolph Carter that rules as king in Ilek-Vad hides his still inhuman appearance behind gilded silk and auric mask. His mind was now beyond Randolph Carter of Boston or Zkauba of Yaddith, yet it was not the archetypal mind that exists outside dimensioned space. He had shaped an ego cohesive and new, the summation of myriad existences.

“Great monarch,” I addressed him with a tone of humility, “we have travelled at the behest of the Sovereign in Shad-u-kham with a summons for a fête to be held when the Hunter’s Moon transits the Midnight Sun.”

“The Mighty Messenger is not a generous ruler,” Carter answered. “He warned that our next encounter would not be as merciful as our last, when he sent me to my death on the back of a Shantak. I suppose that should I refuse, he would visit destruction upon my kingdom by Crawling Chaos?”

“It seems you are too isolated among your prisms and rainbows. Nyarlathotep no longer rules in the Dreaming, not in Kadath or Cytharion. The stars in the Waking are pernicious, and the aeons, strange. My Master in the labyrinthine Nightmare City is a King Whom emperors serve, and He sends me with neither carrot nor stick. His Word is enough.”

“It’s a terrible thing to be in the hands of the Living God...” Carter’s words were a tacit acknowledgment. He knows what xanthous tatters enshroud the Deeper Slumber.

My Sharkling companion remained close by my side, observing all and saying nothing. I led Toolee out of the castle into a subterranean garden. The singular star’s light filtered through the glass structure of the mountain, such that the exotic and alien plants that were not luminescent lit up by different chromatic hues. In the reddest portion of the garden, I plucked an incarnadine poppy, and offered my companion to smell the bloom. Its effects were instant.

“I have enjoyed your company, but I know you long for home, so consider this:



If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended—  
That thou hast slumbered there;  
Just strange visions brought thee here...